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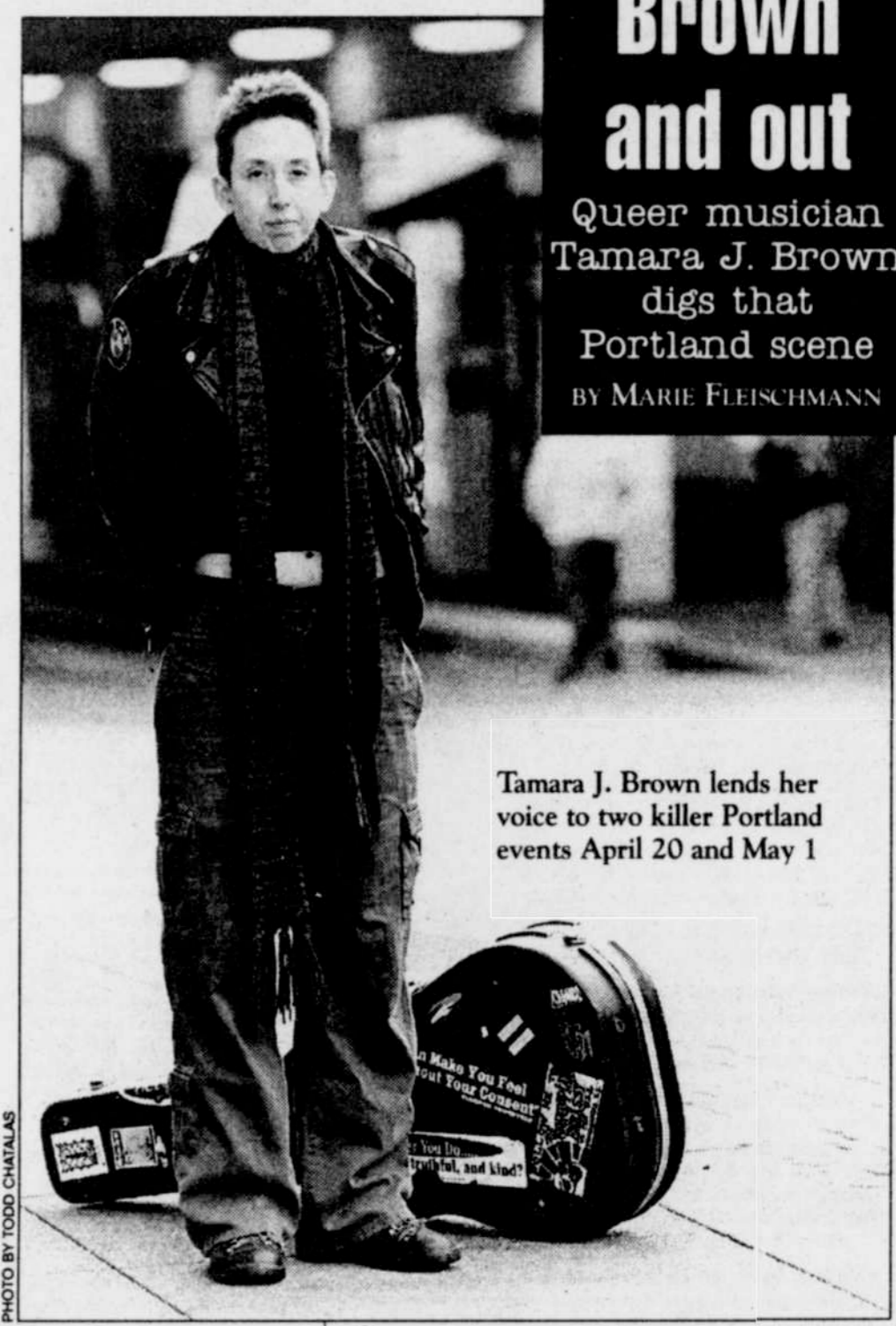
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**MUSIC**

## Brown and out

Queer musician Tamara J. Brown digs that Portland scene  
BY MARIE FLEISCHMANN



Tamara J. Brown lends her voice to two killer Portland events April 20 and May 1

**W**hen singer/songwriter Tamara J. Brown was 15, her mother took away the family television and, in retaliation, Brown picked up her first guitar.

She played along with the radio and cassette tapes—everything from Edie Brickell to The Smiths—and slowly, without realizing it, “I could play music,” she exclaims. “One day I started to play [Pink Floyd’s] ‘Wish You Were Here,’ and I couldn’t believe it. From then on I was obsessed—I played five to six hours daily for the first several years, getting together with friends and jamming out.... Here I am, 16 years later, still at it.”

Born in the small, industrial town of Meadville, Pa., and transplanted from the growing music scene in Ithaca, N.Y., the new Portlander has been schooled by playing with some of the best. She recalls her fondest musical memory: “It was a show I did in Ithaca at the ABC Cafe in 2000. I was accompanied by my band at that time and Hank Roberts, world-famous cellist, who was recently just back from a European tour with Andy Summers from The Police. It was an amazing night, and I have the recording to prove it!”

The young dyke’s current projects include a much-anticipated CD compilation (arranged by Haven owner Dale Schiff and recorded at Jackpot Records) to benefit the Sexual Minority Youth Recreation Center, which has made quite an impression on Brown. “Everyday people inspire me,” she comments. “People getting together and doing amazing things through organizations and nonprofits like SMYRC inspire me. Richie Havens, Joni Mitchell, [John] Coltrane, [Charles] Mingus, Soulive, Alix Olson, Pamela Means, 72-year-old women at a peace marches, people on the bus, voices speaking truth about themselves and what they see—that’s inspiring.”

In addition to inspiring others with her three solo voice-and-guitar albums—1998’s *What Is Mine*, 1999’s *Change the Channel* and 2002’s *Rant and Wail*, which she describes as “truly raw, recorded in an hour and a half”—the eclectic folk artist is also booking a tour of the East Coast for late summer and early fall.

Though her musical ventures are primarily solo, Brown says she’s always open to “the right mix,” with current interests delving into the open jam and the implosion style of jazz and blues—which she calls “the birthplace of politics in music.”

Having toured the East Coast and gigged all over the country, the singer is happy to set-

tle in the Pacific Northwest. “I always wanted to try the West Coast on for size,” she notes.

She and her partner, Portland thespian Juliana Jaffe, seen last year in the triangle productions! musical *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, went “cross country,” she explains, in 2001 to scout out a place to move to. “We had only planned to hang in Portland for a day, but we met two amazing people at an open mike...who took us in like family, gave us the key to their house, full run of the fridge and showed us around.”

Thanks to these extraordinarily friendly locals “we fell in love with Portland and the beautiful people here...we felt like Portland was an enhanced version of Ithaca.... I felt so at home right away!”

Expect Brown to stick around for a while. “The Northwest is so full of beautiful forest land, mountains, rivers and beautiful people fighting tooth and nail to protect them from industry! It is inspiring to witness all of the social and environmental activism going on...so fortifying to live in such a Mecca of growth and change.”

She’s quick to point out that Portlanders shouldn’t take that for granted. “I have come from a place where I never would have imagined Portland could ever exist. It will be a long time till there is something like SMYRC in my hometown. It is so wonderful that Portland is so accepting of new things, ideas and perspectives!”

TAMARA J. BROWN joins the Flat Mountain Girls, Myshkin and Pirate Jane for the Laydeez Hoedown, a fund-raiser for In Other Words, 7 p.m. April 20 at the Alberta Street Public House, 1036 N.E. Alberta St. Tickets are \$5 plus donations at the door. She plays 8 p.m. May 1 with queer artists Alix Olson and Pamela Means at Nocturnal, 1800 E. Burnside St. Tickets are \$10 in advance from In Other Words. For more information visit [www.tamarajbrown.com](http://www.tamarajbrown.com).

PHOTO BY TODD CHATALAS